



Program Report 2020-2021

Lessons from a Pandemic

No one would ever wish for a year like 2020-2021, yet the challenges faced during the pandemic revealed some truths about VWB/VSF, its work, its partners, and its Canadian supporters that might never be discovered in ordinary times. If there is a single word to describe those truths it would be resilience.

For VWB/VSF staff, the switch to working remotely did not represent much of a change. Staff have worked primarily from home for several years so unlike many workplaces, VWB/VSF did not experience a drop in productivity while staff adapted to a new way of working. Rather, they devoted their energies to making new, remote connections with partners, and finding new ways to pursue our One Health agenda. Some activities met with greater success because of the restrictions. Our on-line summit on animal health in the Canadian north attracted well over 100 participants from the north and the south, far more than we could have accommodated through a face-to-face event.

From the beginning however, there were great concerns about our partners in Africa and Asia. We work in places where health-care resources are very limited. People need to produce food, whether or not there is a pandemic underway. We were particularly concerned about the difficulties of marketing and distribution through crowded marketplaces where washing facilities, personal protective equipment, and social distancing are unheard of luxuries.

But our partners rose to this challenge. They have continued to support the efforts of smallholder farmers to produce food and care for animals. With our support, made possible through the flexibility of our major funder, Global Affairs Canada, our partners also threw them-



Chalk lines maintain social distance for farmers lining up for seed in South Sudan.

selves into protecting their members and clients through education, washing stations, and safe protocols in their programming. For example Community Animal Health Workers were able to re-direct their knowledge of hygiene and sanitation to human health issues. We remain concerned about our friends in the South as they wait for a glimmer of equity in the distributions of vaccines. But we have no doubts about their talent and determination in the face of great adversity.

We are also deeply grateful for the faith and loyalty of our supporters. At a time of economic uncertainty when many charitable organizations struggled to find donations, our supporters showed their generosity through our on-line campaign, auctions, and concerts. Because of this, we will emerge from this crisis stronger than ever.

Finally, this pandemic has shone a spotlight on the One Health approach that drives all of our work here at VWB/VSF. Experts from many disciplines have seen that a careful balance of human, animal, and environmental health will help us work our way through this crisis, and is essential in preventing future pandemics.

Volunteering

Building a Foundation for the VETS Program



A trainer demonstrating effective handwashing technique.

In spite of the fact that COVID-19 eliminated all options for international travel, essentially making it impossible for Canadian volunteers to work overseas, 2020-2021 was a surprisingly productive year for VWB/VSF activities. This was the first year of the new Volunteers Engaged in Gender-Responsive Technical Solutions (VETS) project. And while the pandemic has delayed most of the overseas placements planned for the year, technology allowed VWB/VSF to create the foundation for this 7 year project. Two new Ottawa-based program officers and a finance manager were recruited. Local project coordinators were hired and briefed in 5 of the 6 countries (Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Vietnam, and Cambodia). VWB/VSF and its local partners, with the help of local experts, were able to complete community needs assessments, as well as specific assessments into gender relations and the environment in the target communities.

COVID-19 created its own set of priorities and activities for the project. VWB/VSF was grateful that VETS project funder, Global Affairs Canada, showed flexibility and concern for international partners by allowing organizations to redirect funds and energy to activities designed to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in project countries, and to allow the recruitment of local volunteers and Canadians working remotely. A Canadian volunteer living in Vietnam took on important work on gender issues and community communications and organization. In Africa, a Canadian volunteer who was already in-country was recruited for livestock work, and local volunteers were

also recruited to work on gender issues and community organization.

Training in COVID-19 prevention, particularly for farmers and people who work with livestock, was an important focus. In Africa, 32,000 people were directly trained through more than 70 in-person sessions and 50,000 people tuned in for three radio discussions. As well posters and flyers were created and deployed at key locations. VWB/VSF partners were fortunate that washing stations were built at most of the major rural markets in project communities. Trainers were able to use these facilities for hands-on education.

Training was also an important element in Asia programming with 6,668 beneficiaries trained. In Vietnam, for exam-

ple, VWB/VSF trained trainers to work in two remote Northeastern communes, Bao Cuong and Lau Thuong. This region is inhabited primarily by small-scale farmers from ethnic minorities with limited access to technology. Through community consultations it was determined that there was confusion around COVID-19 prevention practices. In order to address this, the project developed COVID-19 risk communication messages and training tools designed to help people in the area protect themselves. Preparations were also made to install hand washing stations at local schools.

Building on the knowledge gained through the various assessments, VWB/VSF and its partners were able to lay a solid foundation that will ensure that the project stays true to its commitment to gender equity. In Vietnam, workshops involving local leaders –both men and women—mapped gender roles within communities and created strategies to ensure that women are meaningfully involved in decision making, and that women and girls are empowered throughout the project.



South Sudan

Sustainable Agriculture and Livestock Production Initiative

VWB/VSF efforts to increase food production and income for herders and farmers met with considerable success in 2020. That can be attributed, in part, to the fact that Aweil South County, the area of the former Bahr El Ghazal State where VWB/VSF is responsible for project implementation, was relatively conflict-free during the year. And while COVID 19 required some adaptation, the project was able to proceed with planned activities. VWB/VSF's work in South Sudan is part of a project funded by the European Union, coordinated by VSF Suisse, and involving a local organization, Help Restore Youth.



Farmers and a VWB/VSF extension worker display produce at a demonstration plot.

The project may be able to take some credit for the reduction in localized conflict. Last year VWB/VSF established peace committees that brought leaders together to resolve local conflicts, often over resources such as water or pasture. The committees have helped to reactivate traditional conflict resolution systems, defusing potential violence between herders and farmers and between neighboring communities. More than 500 people participated in committee meetings during 2020.

The goal of improving food production and security also met with success in 2020. More than 8,650 individuals benefited directly from various aspects of the project. Training is a key component in ensuring that the progress made is sustainable. The project has trained both Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) and Agricultural Extension Workers. This year, 40 CAHWs received comprehensive refresher training to improve skills and knowledge.

During 2020, Agricultural extension workers trained 360 people, more than half of them women, in improved methods of vegetable production and nearly 300 families received farm visits which included additional advice and instruction on pre and post harvest practices.

As well, 600 households received good quality seed for field crops such as ground nuts, sorghum, bambara

nuts, and sesame. Farmers who suffered losses as a result of the flooding in 2019 were specifically targeted for this distribution. More than 93 per cent of those recipients reported good germination and excellent crop prospects. Associated activities involved an assessment of the quantity and quality of seed available throughout the former Northern Bahr El Ghazal. The 180 farm families who participated in Farmer Field Schools during the first year of the project continued to employ the techniques they learned and the demonstration plots associated with the field schools provided hands-on practice while testing new soil and water conservation practices as well as cropping techniques such as intercropping ground nuts and maize.

Nearly 600 pastoralists received animal care training and services from CAHWs during 2020. More than 30,000 animals were de-wormed and vaccinated against a range of diseases and CAHWs also took the lead in promoting COVID 19 prevention in rural communities. Another important milestone was the creation of an agro-pastoral supply centre to supply CAHWs and farmers with veterinary supplies and agricultural inputs. A committee was created to choose the site for the facility, to select two CAHWs and two Agricultural Extension Workers to run the outlet, and to establish functional and effective supply chains to ensure that the facility is well stocked.

By replacing hand hoeing with oxen or donkey plows, it is possible for a family to significantly increase their acreage under cultivation and the amount of food produced. South Sudan has a lot of arable land that is not under cultivation, and also has an abundance of animals that can be trained to pull plows. Six farmers were trained as trainers in all aspects of animal traction. In turn, they trained another 40 farmers and distributed 20 plows on a cost recovery basis.



Six farmers were given in-depth training in animal traction, including selection of the animals, training the animals, and appropriate use of implements.

Northern Animal Health Initiative

2020 was a banner year for the newly named Northern Animal Health Initiative thanks, in part, to a generous grant from PetSmart Charities of Canada. Not only was VWB/VSF able to expand the number of clinics offered in remote, underserved communities, despite COVID travel restrictions, but it also completed a number of activities designed to improve collaboration and co-operation related to northern animal health care. All of these activities were guided by a newly formed advisory committee which met remotely 8 times during the course of the year.



Prospective clients, Resolute Bay.

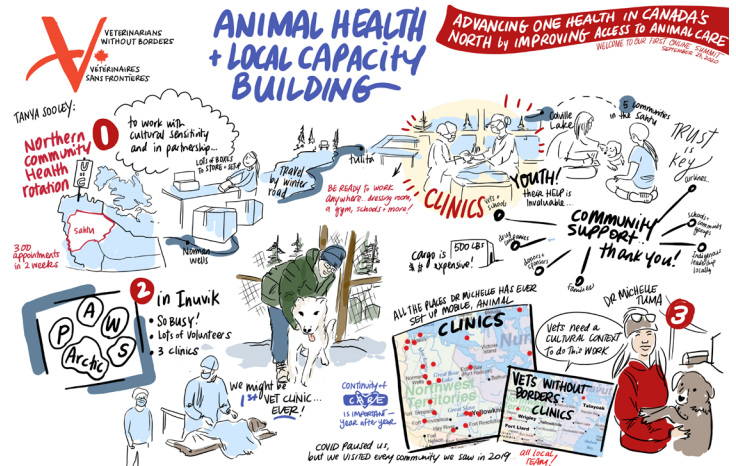
The success of the temporary clinics is due in large measure to animal health professionals who live in the north. Dr. Michelle Tuma of Yellowknife, is the on-site coordinator for VWB/VSF's northern work. She was able to assemble teams of people from the north to provide the clinics in Fort Liard and Wrigley in NWT, and Taloyoak in Nunavut. Inadvertently, the pandemic helped to further VWB/VSF's efforts to coordinate with other organizations involved in northern animal health. With southern volunteers unable to travel north, Dr. Tuma was called upon to assist Northern Canine Rescue, NWT SPCA, and NunaVet in Nunavut. She also supported the University of Calgary's annual clinics in the five communities of the Sahtu region, a role she has performed in the past.

The pandemic forced VWB/VSF to pivot from an in-person summit on northern animal health to an on-line event, with the unexpected consequence of dramatically increasing the number of people who were able to participate. More than 90 people logged on to the day-long event. Given that there were multiple people participating

on many of those computers, the total number certainly exceeded 100 people.

VWB/VSF also completed a data base identifying the organizations providing animal care in the north, and where those organizations work. This information will allow a greater level of coordination on an on-going basis. In collaboration with government authorities, provincial/territorial veterinary associations and animal health professionals, a comprehensive review of existing northern veterinary service regulations and policies was completed. Potential recruits for Community Animal Management Workers (CAMWs) were identified for future opportunities and CAMWs in selected communities helped to set up and test the GoFetch veterinary telehealth platform.

Another initiative designed to improve northern animal health capacity over the long term involved providing education bursaries to two northern students. Kaitlyn Denroche, from Yellowknife NWT, is currently in the third year of a four-year DVM program at the Western College



Sam Bradd Illustration from the on-line summit

of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon. Kirstyn Falck also grew up near Yellowknife. She is studying wildlife biology at the University of British Columbia – Okanagan Campus and has done her co-op placements as a Wildlife Health Technician with the Government of the Northwest Territory's Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

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